

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Warm Up With a Long Winter Hike at Tims Ford

By Fran Wallas

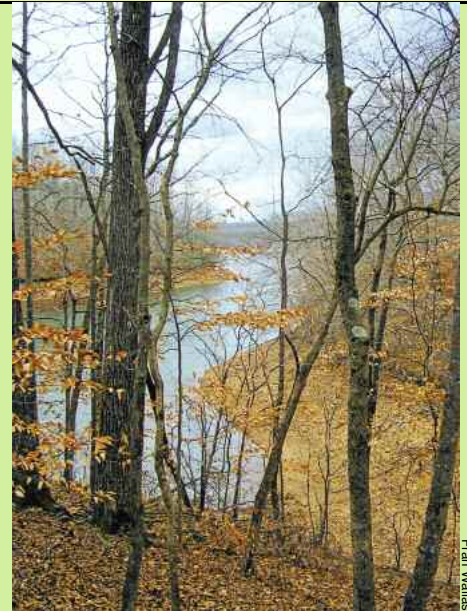
**T**he Ray Branch Shoreline Trail at Tims Ford State Park in Winchester is a strenuous hike because of its length. If you combine the trail with the Marble Plains ADA trail, the hike is about 14 miles.

Begin on the paved ADA Trail that is perfect for children learning to bike, people pushing baby strollers, and people in wheelchairs. The trail is fairly level with many benches along the way. You can enjoy peeks at the lake, golden beech leaves, and maybe a deer in the early morning. In 1.1 miles the paved trail ends at an overlook with views of Tims Ford Lake and Big Island. Two trails lead v-shaped from the right corner of the overlook. Take the one closest to the lake. The trail goes less than a mile and turns on a dirt road. Follow the road almost to the top of the hill where the trail crosses. If you want a shorter hike, turn right on the trail and take the Marble Plains Loop back to the overlook. If you want to continue on the Shoreline Trail, turn left. The trail travels along the shoreline of the Ray Branch finger of Tims Ford Lake and provides many scenic views of the lake. This section of the trail is multi use for hikers and mountain bike riders.

The trail has a pleasing pattern. You hike a level stretch, descend and cross a lake inlet, and climb to the next level stretch. Although strong hikers and bikers can speed along the trail, you may want to stop at the lake, sit quietly and eat a snack. You can bird watch or just enjoy being surrounded by the oak and hickory forest. If you slow down, you will notice the evergreen Ground Cedars along the trail. They look like bonsai, but are a type of Clubmoss.

Near the end of the trail, the pattern changes, and you start up a switchback. The trail becomes a mowed path through an open grassy area. At this point you come to the Evans Loop that adds an additional 3.5 miles to the shoreline hike. The state park is planning to have a primitive backpacking campsite on the loop in the future. If you are running out of daylight, you need to save the loop for a longer spring day. The hike back to the parking lot is on the same shoreline trail. You can shorten the hike back by about a mile by taking the trail straight across the dirt road and using the short part of the Marble Plains Loop Trail back to the overlook.

Check at the office before taking this hike because a new starting section is being added for hikers only.



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**One of the many inlets at Tims Ford Lake. Below: The evergreen Ground Cedar, of the Clubmoss family, can be seen at Tims Ford.**

### Directions

**From Nashville:** Take I-24 to Manchester exit 111. Turn left on Highway 55 W to Tullahoma. Turn left on Highway 130 S. Follow Highway 130 S. to Awalt Rd. and turn right. Follow Awalt Road until it dead ends at Mansford Road and turn left. The park entrance is 1.6 miles on the right.

**From Chattanooga:** Take I-24 W to exit 127 and turn left on Highway 64, Veterans Memorial By-pass. Turn right on Mingo Road to a four-way stop. Turn right on Owl Hollow Road. Turn left at Highway 50 and then right onto Mansford Road. Go five miles to the park entrance on left. There is a separate parking lot at the visitor's center next to the trailhead. Please use the trail map available at the visitor's center.

Tims Ford State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks on the Web site [www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes](http://www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes).)



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